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ABSTRACT

A four-month investigation was conducted of media coverage of two controversies involving government officials in Detroit, Michigan. Data were gathered from three sources: journalists involved in covering the stories, people involved in the stories, and the printed stories. Using public documents, the history of one of the controversies was reconstructed, and this was used to compare what actually happened with the media's interpretation of what happened. Among the conclusions reached in the study are the following: (1) the media raised legitimate and important questions about how the city of Detroit conducted its business in both controversies; (2) the stories as covered by the media differed in significant ways from the story as reconstructed; (3) the media seemed particularly inept in explaining, in both controversies, the nature of the investigation and the role the media were playing in it; (4) the media made extensive use of unnamed sources in both controversies; (5) in both cases, the media repeatedly released information suggesting wrongdoing; (6) broadcast journalists viewed the controversies as newspaper stories and reported mostly what the newspapers were reporting; and (7) the columns of the newspapers studied contained some clear instances of racist language. Media reaction to the study was somewhat defensive and narrowly focused. (A copy of one columnist's reaction to the study is appended.) (FL)

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A Report on Detroit Media Coverage Of Magnum and Vista: A Case Study of Press Criticism

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides details of a study of media coverage of two controversies in Detroit. The project is treated as a case study, with details of the study itself as well as reactions to the study provided. Included are conclusions about common media deficiences and their significance in racially tense circumstances as well as conclusions about the reactions of the media institutions and individual journalists to outside criticism.

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A Report on Media Coverage of Magnum and Vista:
A Case Study of Press Criticism

I. Introduction

In September of 1983 the three authors of this paper began a four-month investigation of media coverage of two stories which had been covered extensively in the Detroit media in 1982-3. The first story had come to be known as "Magnum" and involved a city contract for the delivery of bus fuel. The second story came to be known as "Vista", and it, too, involved a contract between the city and a supplier. The Vista contract was for the disposal of solid wastes from the sewage treatment plant.

The research team of three faculty members in the School of Journalism at Ohio State University undertook this investigation at the request of Robert Berg, press secretary to Mayor Coleman Young. In so doing the team set four conditions on the project. First, the project was not be to paid for with public funds. Second, the data gathered as part of the project would be the property of the research team and could be used by that team in any manner desired. Third, the monies for the project were to be transferred to Ohio State University and not to the individual members of the team. Finally, the money was to be paid regardless of the conclusions reached by the team.

Prior to the beginning of the project Robert Berg contacted chief editorial officers of the two Detroit daily newspapers to determine if they were interested in partially funding the research project. Both papers declined.

The money for the project was provided by the Moving Detroit Forward Committee, described by the mayor's office as a private group interested in community advancement and by reporters as one of Mayor Colemar Young's "slush funds." By agreement, $10,000 was set aside for expenses; an additional $2500 was transferred to Ohio State University at the completion of the project to be used for faculty enrichment, i.e., to support faculty travel and similar School needs. No money was received by any member of the research team.

The three members of the research team met with Robert Berg in early September to discuss the project and its goals. The directive from the Mayor's Office was very general: The team was asked to examine coverage of the two stories and evaluate it. No specific instructions about the type of evaluation were provided.

As part of the investigation the researchers engaged in three related

activities. First, members of the team met with and interviewed journalists who had been involved in coverage in either of the two stories. Second, the researchers spoke with sources involved in the stories and examined relevant documents. Finally, the researchers examined the stories themselves. A report containing separate sections devoted to the findings from these areas of study was presented to Robert Berg and Mayor Coleman Young at the end of January of 1984.

Each of the three investigators has worked as a journalist. Dr. Becker worked as a reporter for daily newspapers in Kentucky and Kansas. He holds degrees from the University of Kentucky and the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Schwartz was an editor or reporter for weekly and small daily newspapers in Montana and South Dakota. His degrees are from the University of Minnesota, the University of Wisconsin--River Falls, South Dakota State University and Southern Illinois University. Ms. West was a government and political affairs reporter for several Ohio daily newspapers. She has her degrees from Ohio State University.

Becker is a professor at Ohio State who teaches social science research methodologies and conducts research on various aspects of public opinion and the activities of journalists and media organizations. Schwartz is an assistant professor who teaches and conducts research in various areas of mass media law. West is an assistant professor who teaches reporting and writing and continues to write for the mass media.

II. Document Study

An attempt was made to reconstruct the history of the Magnum controversy relying entirely on public documents. It was necessary to single out for study the Magnum story, however, for the simple reason that the relevant documents for Vista were not available. As indicated above, the Vista trial was underway as this study was being conducted.

Two files constituted the primary documents for the Magnum history: the court records and the Magnum file in the city clerk's office. The former included briefs and exhibits filed by attorneys involved in the Magnum case, records concerning legal developments, and the judge's opinion. The latter consisted of the City Council minutes, correspondence, legal notices, and dozens of miscellaneous materials.

The document analysis was intended to serve two purposes: first, to establish, independent of news media coverage, what actually happened during the two-year period of the contract, and, second, to provide a basis for comparison with the news media's interpretations of what occurred.

III. Interviews with the Journalists

The research team made the decision to conduct interviews with journalists working for the two Detroit daily newspapers, the weekly Michigan Chronicle, television stations WJBK (Channel 2), WDIV (Channel 4), WXYZ (Channel 7), WKBD (Channel 50), WTVS (Channel 56), and WGPR (Channel 62), and radio stations CKLW, WCXI, WGPR, WJR, WWJ and WXYZ.

The strategy for identifying journalists to be interviewed was very straightforward. Interviews were to be conducted with all reporters and editors who had been involved in coverage of the Magnum and Vista stories. Initial contacts were made with chief editorial personnel at each of these media to help identify relevant journalists. From these contacts a pool of relevant journalists was developed.

Full cooperation was provided by both of the daily newspapers, the black, weekly newspaper, two of the television stations and four of the radio stations. At another of the television stations management agreed to interviews but would not allow reporters to be interviewed. Management of the news department of another of the television stations refused to be interviewed but allowed reporters to be interviewed "on their own time." Management of the news department of yet another television station did not return repeated telephone calls to schedule interviews. A requested interview with the producer of a week-in-review program on the public television station was denied. One of the radio station refused to cooperate.

Several of the journalists interviewed expressed skepticism about the project and its goals. Many acknowledged anxiety about being interviewed. One of those most involved in coverage of the story said that he agreed to the interview only because those doing the research were "journalists or former journalists and understand what we do."

Several individuals who contacted the research team indicating they would like to be interviewed were interviewed. At the request of the Detroit chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists, a member of the research team met with the group and discussed the project.

A total of 44 formal interviews were conducted with journalists, and several less formal interviews were held. All were guaranteed that their responses would be treated confidentially and that they would not be associated with specific responses in this report.

Journalists interviewed were asked their opinions of Coleman Young, of politicians in general, and of general strategies for coverage of the city

of Detroit. In addition, journalists were asked to assess their own coverage of Magnum and Vista as well as the coverage of their colleagues for their own organization as well as competing organizations. Background information on the journalists also was obtained.

IV. Interviews with the Sources

Interviews were attempted with sources used by the reporters for Magnum stories in the two daily newspapers. Magnum was chosen because of the availability of documents. In fact, in many cases, the same sources were involved in both the Magnum and Vista stories, so some Vista sources were interviewed for this reason. The list of sources was derived from a reading of the Magnum stories. Some sources played minor roles and were not contacted for interviews. Cooperation from major sources was mixed.

Some sources were anxious to speak. Some sources reluctantly agreed. Still others flatly refused. Those who refused offered a variety of reasons, including that they felt the interviews would be a waste of time since they believed the study had pre-determined conclusions contrary to their own beliefs. Some said they simply were too busy to provide the time. Others who refused to cooperate said they were tired of the affair and wanted to forget it.

Thirty-six sources were interviewed. They were asked, among other things, about their experiences with reporters, their strategies for dealing with the press, and their feelings about the effects of the Magnum coverage. All sources were offered the opportunity to speak anonymously. Some insisted on anonymity. Some wished to speak only on the record. Others asked that parts of the interviews be treated confidentially.

Included in the list of sources interviewed were court officials, appointed city officials, and city council members. Late in this phase of the project (and late in the overall project schedule) an interview was conducted with Mayor Coleman Young.

V. Conclusions of the Study

The final section of the report, which was in excess of 150 typed pages, was a set of conclusions about media coverage of the Magnum and Vista stories. Because that concluding section played such a prominent role in media reaction to the reported. it is reproduced here in its entirity.

The controversies surrounding the Magnum and Vista contracts have raised fundamental questions about the responsibilities of both elected officials and the mass media. At the bottom of the charges leveled by the

Young administration on the one hand and the media on the other is the basic question: Is the public good being served.

We began our investigation with some basic assumptions of our own. First, we are strong believers in the value of a free and open society in which the activities of government are conducted for all to see. Second, we value highly the rights assigned to the mass media under the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Our strong biases are in favor of the media, for which each of us has at one time worked and for which we now train our students.

In part because we recognize those biases, we have tried hard in our research to step back from them. We have tried as best we can to be open to the criticisms of those outside the media, particularly those who are the subject of intense media scrutiny.

A more fundamental rationale for our examination of the media from the point of view of the outsider was the belief that the media themselves are too infrequently examined and discussed in an open forum. The media control the flow of information. Rarely do they include in that information flow serious examinations of their own behavior.

That isn't to say that the media failed to report the frequent attacks on themselves by the Young administration. Quite the opposite is true. Rather we feel that the charges, coming so clearly from an interested party, were treated with much defensiveness and without, at least in the news and editorial columns, serious consideration of their implications.

There is no such thing as an unbiased observer, we feel. We have already indicated some of our biases. Many of the reporters we interviewed made much of the fact that a fund controlled by the mayor funded the project. We tried to protect ourselves by setting up several safeguards. The data are ours to release as we see fit. We have written assurances that our expenses will be paid regardless of our conclusion. We met with Coleman Young only once and didn't discuss our findings with him or his assistants prior to the completion of this report. We feel we were successful in isolating ourselves from Young's influence. Others may choose to feel otherwise.

We also should note another significant set of biases. We are members of the dominant white culture living in middle class neighborhoods far from the realities of Detroit and its monumental urban problems. We have tried to listen. But we heard with white, middle class ears and minds.

It is important to note, however, that our charge was not to examine

racism in the behavior of the Detroit media. Our charge was to examine media coverage of the Magnum and Vista stories. We were asked to judge that coverage in terms of professional ethics and standards of fairness. We chose to look for racism in the media because it seemed to us essential to do so. We suspect most others would agree. But it was our bias that led us in that direction.

The reality is that there are no set of standards against which media behavior can be judged. None of the codes of ethics in existence are specific enough to provide much guidance in our examination of the Detroit media and the coverage of Magnum and Vista. Rather we relied on more general notions of fairness in social transactions.

In addition, we found ourselves asking the basic question: Is society being served by these media behaviors? Fundamentally, we raised questions of responsibility. Clearly the media have the legal right to do many things. The Magnum and Vista controversy is not about that legal right. Rather it is about the responsibility that many feel should go with it.

It is important to acknowledge we had a tremendous luxury in our research--a luxury which none of the participants in the controversies had. We were about to go back and evaluate without the constraints of daily journalists or daily operation of government. It should be easier to see patterns and deficiences from such a distance.

In the sections preceeding we have detailed the data we gathered as part of this project. We summarized what we learned from our interviews with journalists and with the sources of many of the Magnum stories. We also provided descriptions of the mass of stories emerging from the controversy surrounding these two contracts.

What follow are our conclusions, not necessarily in order of their importance. Rather we have tried to make our observations in an orderly fashion so related points are considered together. Not everyone will agree with these observations or conclusions. Perhaps no one will agree with all of them. We do hope, however, that these points are considered in the spirit with which they are offered. We hope we can shed some light on the problem and at least make all of the parties sensitive to the perspectives of others.

1. Our basic belief is that the media raised legitimate and important questions about how the city of Detroit conducted its business in both the Magnum and Vista contracts. The Magnum story is about inefficiencies and errors which at least are associated with the city of Detroit paying a very

high price for fuel for city buses. Vista is about the potential misuse of public funds for the betterment of individuals, rather than the citizenry. The media cannot and should not ignore questions of such significance.

2. At the same time, we found, particularly in the Magnum story, which we could examine in greater detail than Vista, that the story as covered by the media differed in significant ways from the story as we have come to see it. Magnum began with the assumption of wrongdoing, of the conversion of taxpayer monies to private good. The early stories hinted and suggested of such. They never took seriously the possibility that the story really was about incompetence or honest errors. In the end, that seems to have been the case.

In our view, the media were guilty, at least in Magnum, of failing to treat seriously enough a story of mismanagement. Rather the story was turned into something else. The rewards of journalism seem in our opinion to focus too heavily on illegality.

3. At the same time, the media became embroiled in, in fact seemed to bring about in part, a tremendous political battle in Magnum which changed the basic nature of the story. In the editorial columns of the papers and in the news stories, the council became the potential saviours, the gallant knights rescuing the city from the evils and darkness of the administrative branch of government. The council became a major part of the story because the media regularly cover it, i.e., have made the decision ahead of time that it is important, and because some of the council members know how to keep the story before the media. The media seemed to want to believe that council was the solution to the problem. The possibility that it was a major part of the problem (through its own incompetence in contract activities and the goals of its individual members) was never treated seriously.

4. The Magnum story particularly raised basic questions about the nature of Detroit government. As outsiders, we came to the story without an understanding of that government. From the news stories, we gained little education. The real powers of the mayor were never fully explained, nor were those of council. The political implications of council acts were explained in great detail. The media seemed to have a fascination with that component of the story. The structural aspects of the story were not explained. The reality is that the mayor in Detroit is an extremely powerful administrator.

5. The media seemed particularly inept in explaining, in both Magnum

and Vista, the nature of the investigation and the role the media were playing in it. In Magnum, Prosecutor Patrick Foley stated quite clearly that he allowed the media to do the investigation. Witnesses were called based on media coverage. While this is not unusual behavior in many cases, the relationship of the press and the government is a fundamental part of the Magnum and Vista stories. And it was never seriously covered.

When the Mayor aired his claims that the media were being used by the government, particularly in Vista, the media dutifully reported. But they did nothing to explain the basis of that charge. They never really made the development and coverage of the story a story in and of itself. Yet it was just that examination that the Mayor was calling for. According to Coleman Young, the significant aspect of the Vista story is government ethics and government use of the media. Until the media decide to seriously cover themselves and the ways in which they deal with sources, they will never cover Coleman Young's side of the story.

To do what Coleman Young was asking, of course, would be to radically alter the way the media operate. Instead of protecting sources, the media would have to reveal them. Each new piece of leaked information would not be treated as a new truth revealed for the media, but at another attempt by the source to use the media to tell the story. For the media, that would be a very difficult story to tell.

6. The media did make extensive use of unnamed sources in both the Magnum and Vista stories. In many cases, these sources did not appear to be those who would require such protection. Rather they were the "knowledgeable sources" that provided little pieces of the story. To the reader, these are unnamed. To the Mayor, they are part of the group of accusers working with the media to attack him and his administrators. In our opinion, it is a sloppy habit on the part of the media which only exacerbates the problems raised by Vista and Magnum.

7. In both the Magnum and Vista stories, the media repeatedly released information suggesting wrongdoing. Acquittals or other action suggesting that no crime been committed produce a few stories. There is never any balance in this regard. There is no evidence of the effect of this kind of coverage on the audience.

8. There is no law which says that Coleman Young has to hold press conferences and otherwise devote a great deal of his time to answering questions of the media. Much of the bad publicity he received during Magnum and Vista, however, seemed to result in part from what the media term

"stonewalling," that is, not telling them something when they ask. During the development of Magnum, the media carried the story by making "stonewalling" a part of the story. The analogy of two children fighting of the rules of game is quite appropriate. The mayor seemed to assume the media would go away when they didn't get any information. The media responded by staying longer.

9. In a very real sense, the Mayor of Detroit and the Detroit media serve different constituencies. The media seem never to have recognized that. The reporters talk about Detroit as a large metropolitan area spreading far from the city center. Coleman Young wasn't elected by those people. In the view of the Mayor, the media represent an outside set of interests--interests which should be treated with suspicion. Given the social geography of the metropolitan area, there is a racist relationship between the media and the city.

10. Reporters seem to have great difficulty examining their product in commercial terms. News is a product which is sold to audience members; the audience amassed for news is sold to advertisers for the gain of the media owners. While journalists don't make day-to-day decisions based on commercialism, the general behaviors of the media are based on these interests. Until reporters take seriously this observation they will never understand the position of their critics who fail to see them as unbiased servants of the people, but rather as participants in the market economy.

11. The unwillingness of several individuals and media organizations to participate in this study is the kind of behavior which may well serve to reinforce audience notions of isolation and arrogance on the part of the media. If the media really intend to take seriously their claims that they represent the members of their audience, they must make sure they know something of that audience and make that audience feel they are interested in learning of them.

12. By the admission of broadcast journalists we spoke with, Magnum and Vista were newspaper stories. The broadcasters were "reactive," that is, they reported mostly what the newspapers were reporting. None of the television stations even maintains a bureau in the city-county building in Detroit. The excuse for this "reactive" reporting is a lack of staff. In other words, the broadcast stations are saying they don't have enough staff to cover the city independently. The result all too often will be a kind of journalism where the story is defined and shaped by a few individuals and followed by others. All the evidence we have from the Magnum and Vista

stories is that just that happened in these cases.

13. As already noted, the Magnum story particularly was defined in rather narrow terms early in its history. It was a story of potential corruption, rather than incompetence. The deescalator clause (which was never reported verbatim) was given great weight, as were the claims of Auditor-General Marie Farrell-Donaldson. The newspapers were looking for something illegal. It would have been very valuable to have someone else in the media willing to look for different angles on the story in an effort to explore other, potentially more significant, components. In the case of Vista, the media should have given much more attention to the conflict over water between the city and the suburbs over water.

14. The news columns of the two newspapers contain some clear instances of racist language. Magnum was referred to throughout in the News as "minority-owned" or something similar when it seemed to have little bearing on development of the story. The council debate was dealt with in racial terms almost invariably. Columnist Pete Waldmeir, through his choice of style and language, frequently demonstrated an insensitivity to issues of race. The fact that he is a columnist probably doesn't mean much to readers, who probably assume that his insensitive choice of terms and mockery of language styles is reflective of ongoing attitudes at the paper.

15. The media seem to have great difficulty recognizing that news by definition is racist. News is what is exceptional. To a white in a dominant white society, being black is unusual. Having a black mayor is unusual. Hiring black contractors is unusual. Having a meeting where whites aren't allowed or welcome is unusual. In each case, race is the basis for deciding what is unusual, and what is, therefore, news.

News doesn't exist in the world, waiting for journalists to pluck it and put it in the paper or broadcast it over the air. News is created by journalists to suit their own needs. Decisions about what is and what is not news are made routinely, often without much thought. That is the problem.

The media have to recognize that as long as they continue to operate in an unequal society where that inequality is based on race and don't constantly try to change that inequality by taking affirmative action, they are racist. What this means is that the sins of journalism have the potential of furthering racism in a racist society. The individual journalists may not be overtly racist. Their products may well be.

What is needed is a willingness to evaluate that product, a

willingness to consider its consequences, a willingness to see it as those outside the profession of journalism may see it. That alternative perspective deserves more attention in the news columns of the written press and on the newscasts of the broadcast media.

VI . Media Reactions to the Report

Media interest in the study and report was high throughout the term of the project. Stories appeared in both daily papers announcing the study. Team members were interviewed by reporters on several occasions during the study period. Several attempts were made to learn of study findings before the actual report was released.

The report was provided to the Mayor's office in early February and released by that office on February 8. Media reaction was quick and extensive. The Free Press ran a story on page 1 of the February 9 edition. The story jumped inside and was accompanied by a sidebar containing responses of the executive editor of the paper. The conclusions were run verbatim opposite the editorial page of that same edition. Executive Editor David Lawrence, in the sidebar, said the "report is worthy, important reading" which "raises good questions about the use of unidentified sources, about the diversity of our staffs, about our obligations to insist that our coverage be accurate and fair and that we increase reader understanding. The report should contribute to a healthy discussion--within our newsrooms, between the press and people in government, between journalists and those we serve." Lawrence did criticize aspects of the report, claiming in particular that it was "at times neither careful nor precise in its repeated use of the words 'racist' and 'racism.'"

Coverage in the News was less extensive. The paper carried the story on an inside, local news page on February 9. Included in the story, which jumped into the same section, were comments of Editor Lionel Lindner criticizing the report. In part, Lindner was quoted as saying: "If the whole world is racist and the professors aren't measuring us against a set of standards, what in the world is this report all about? Just contractual social commentary." The story quoted Free Press Editor Lawrence's more favorable comments.

The three local network affiliated stations also gave the report heavy play on the February 8 newscasts, both early in the evening and in the late night programs. These reports relied heavily on our summary to capsule the study. The newspaper editors were given opportunities to respond.

By prearrangement, two of us attended a meeting of the Detroit Chapter

of the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, on February 9. Despite the generally favorable media coverage of the report, that meeting can best be described as hostile. Reporters who were involved in coverage of Magnum and Vista questioned the research methodology, particularly the nature of the interviews conducted with them. The Free Press ran a story on this meeting.

The SPJ, SDX meeting seemed to be a turning point in local coverage of the report. The Free Press ran an editorial on February 12 attacking the report, in part because of the source of funding. The editorial, nor any of the news coverage, ever mentioned that the two papers were asked to jointly fund the project but refused. Several critical columns appeared in the papers and on local radio criticizing the report. One of these columns, by News columnist Pete Waldmeir, is reprinted at the end of this report. It is worth noting that the kind of racial insensitivity represented by this report was criticized heavily in our report. That criticism did appear in the Free Press reports and in several of the television accounts, but not in the story on the report in the News.

The Magnum/Vista report received attention outside Detroit as well. On February 10 two of us met with the Central Michigan Chapter of SPJ, SDX to discuss the report. The February 12 edition of the paper contained a report on that meeting. Editor & Publisher ran a two-page story on the report in the March 3, 1984, edition. Quill ran a one-page story on the report in the April 1984 edition. A quote from the report even made the Notable & Quotable column of the Wall Street Journal of April 17, 1984. The Columbia Journalism Review gave the Detroit Free Press a Laurel in its Comment section for its "upfront account and general treatment" of the report, which, CJR wrongly said, was an "Ohio University" project.

VI. Conclusions

We never expected the report to produce a positive response from the media. Perhaps the initial reactions were a pleasant surprise. The media do not take well to criticism.

In general, comment on the report focused much too narrowly, in our opinions, on the racial aspects of the report. Most of the errors we discovered had little to do with race. The media made mistakes which probably would have been made regardless of the race of the parties involved. But those mistakes take on more significance in the case of a racially charged situation such as exists in Detroit. The media seem insensitive to race, and that is a conclusion we did emphasize in the

report.

It is doubtful the report had much overall impact on media behavior. The individual journalists seemed to become very defensive and to search out ways of dismissing what we said. At the reportorial level, Ohio State suffered from the report. At the managerial level, that probably was not the case.

Each of us learned a great deal from the project. We were reminded of the problems of the news gathering and disseminating activities. Perhaps for the first time we really took seriously the complaints of an outsider and tried to examine the media from that point of view. It is a different perspective, and we are the better teachers and researchers for having learned it.

2-13 The Detroit News

Plans are brewing to beat the papers at their own game

Pete Waldmeir

The phone rang at 8 a.m. I grabbed it on the first ring so that it wouldn't wake the kids.

It was my snitch, Marvin, and he was talking in a whisper.

"I'm at the Manoog," Marvin said. "Been here all night. Couldn't call until they all went to bed. What a party they had! They musta killed every bottle of Ripple in the refrigerator."

I pulled on my robe and picked up the phone in the kitchen. "What were they celebrating about?" I inquired.

"The report, dummy," Marvin said. "The one they bought from those journalism professors from Ohio State about how the newspapers are always picking on the mayor and his pals.

"I NEVER SAW anything like it. The Man was so happy that he finally spent $10,000 and somebody did what they were told, that he called all his department heads together and tossed a real wing-ding.

"But that's not the reason I'm calling you so early in the morning. The big news is ... Coleman's decided to start his own newspaper."

I plugged in the coffee and asked Marvin to tell me more.

"Well, you know how things go," he continued. "They had a few toddies and then dinner catered by Church's and after they passed out the cigars and brandy, Coleman got up to say a few words.

"The two guests of honor were all decked out in their gowns and mortarboards with the cute little tassels dangling over the edge. Coleman ordered a standing ovation and then said he had this surprise.

"He says he's tired of reading all that one-sided garbage in the Detroit press and he wants to tell his story and maybe people will laugh at him, but that they laughed at that organ player from St. Louis and look at all the money he made when he started publishing newspapers.

"WELL, THE PROFESSORS were a little embarrassed and one of them started to point out that maybe the mayor meant Pulitzer and not Wurlitzer. But he was reminded that the Boss doesn't like to hear trash like that from his hired hands, so he clammed up."

But how, I inquired, does he propose to start a newspaper? Where will he find the money and the staff?

"He says money's no big deal," Marvin responded. "If the state Legislature won't vote it and he can't divert the money from block grants, he'll just throw a couple of those $200-a-ticket parties every few months to cover the bills.

"The staff's another question, however. They talked about that for a long time.

"See, at first everybody wanted to grab off the big jobs. There was quite a heated argument over who'd get to be the comics editor, for instance.

"BUT THAT WAS nothing compared to what went on when they started talking about staffing, hours, deadlines and working conditions.

"At first, Coleman told them they'd have to publish seven days a week, just like the other papers. Well, you should have heard the howls.

"So he backed off and agreed that they'd only have to show up the normal hours for city department heads: Tuesday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with two hours for lunch and two half-hour coffee breaks; double time for anything over 30 hours; six weeks' vacation, a month's paid sick leave every six months and 17 paid holidays a year, including their mailman's birthday and Groundhog Day."

What'll he do for circulation people and carriers? I asked.

"That was another hassle," Marvin said. "See, his first suggestion was to publish in the morning, but that got hooted down because nobody wants to get up that early.

"SO HE TURNED it over to Ron Hewitt. He'll have the city bus drivers deliver the papers along their routes on the days when enough staff members show up to get a paper out. It may make the buses a little late, but taxpayers are accustomed to that."

And the editor?

"The mayor's press agent, Bob Berg," Marvin said. "He did such a good job buying the Ohio State report, the Man wouldn't trust anyone else.

"Chief Hart will cover the police beat; Mel Jefferson will handle fires and there won't be any shortage of staff to cover the courthouse because so many of his people spent so much time there already. They won't need anybody for the Mayor's Office, either, because Coleman will write his own stories."

How much will it cost?

"Get this," Marvin answered. "A buck a copy. He admits that's steep, but they'll just put the charge on the water bills. They're so high already that nobody will ever notice."

BEST COPY